

Londoner 65

Chapter 65. Return

~ Kivamus ~

~ Baron's Manor ~

Kivamus was sitting in the manor hall in the evening, along with Duvas and Gorsazo. The guard captain had recently finished today's training session with the new guards, and he was also sitting nearby. There was a fire roaring in the fireplace, and Lucem, Clarisa and Syryne were sitting on the armchairs there, talking amongst themselves, while Madam Helga was busy preparing their evening meal in the kitchen of the manor house. Clarisa, the young maid had slowly become habitual of spending time with Helga's kids, and he didn't see any reason to prevent her from coming into the manor house. She needed new friends to help her forget about the past, especially after going through such a difficult ordeal earlier.

"It's been a week since the caravan left, hasn't it?" he mentioned.

"It has, my Lord," Hudan replied. "If everything went well with them, they should return to the village by tonight."

"Let's hope the Goddess smiles upon us this time, and we get all the grain we sent them for," Duvas said, while gazing upwards with both of his hands clasped together.

As they talked about other things, the sun slowly set in the west, and the yellowish-orange light from the western windows of the manor hall dwindled to nothing. Kivamus was starting to get worried about the caravan by now, but the door opened and a newly recruited guard came inside, with a big smile on his face.

"Milord! There is good news! The caravan is back!" the guard exclaimed happily.

"That's excellent!" Kivamus said. "Is everyone okay in the caravan?"

"They are fine, milord," the guard reported with a grin. "And they have brought a lot of grain with them!"

Kivamus smiled seeing the guard's enthusiasm, as he stood up. He looked at others sitting in the hall. "Come on! Let's take a look."

As he exited the hall with anticipation, others followed him outside as well.

Coming out of the manor house, he saw a commotion near the gates of the manor. It seemed that the guard had already told him the news in excitement before the caravan had even entered inside the gates. He started walking towards the gates as well, where most of the servants and maids of the manor were gathered in the light of a few burning torches there.

Reaching close to the gates, he saw that there was also a small crowd of villagers gathered outside the gates, which was still growing. "That's a lot of people who have assembled here," he observed.

Duvas chuckled. "And it's still only a small crowd. I thought there'd be even more people here."

"Why is that?" Kivamus couldn't help but ask.

"News travels fast in this village, my Lord," Duvas said. "Someone must have informed the villagers about this, and any new caravan coming to the village is always a sight to see for the people here, especially the return of such a highly anticipated caravan."

"This is not a big city like Ulriga, my Lord," Gorsazo remarked, "where a lot of things are happening all the time. People in such big cities are habitual of new caravans and horse mounted knights coming and going all the time."

He continued, "For the nobles, there are feasts, banquets, and drama theaters, apart from the regular hunting expeditions. Even for the commoners, Ulriga has a lot of places for people to entertain themselves - taverns and alehouses are present of course, along with regular street plays, wandering minstrels and traveling circuses, apart from the yearly jousts of knights. But in a small village like this, with hardly any sources of entertainment, people will flock to see any incoming caravan - since that's the only new thing they see for weeks."

"That's true enough," Kivamus said. He did remember that the original Kivamus spent most of his time in the library to get away from his brothers, so he didn't have too many memories of such things.

Gorsazo added wistfully, "In the small village north of Ulriga where I was born, I too have fond memories of running to the edge of the village everytime a new caravan came to our village."

Before they could talk further, he saw the first wagon led by two horses emerging between two houses nearby, and entering the empty ground in front of the manor gates, with others following behind it. As the villagers standing there watched the wagons, one of the guards lifted the oilcloth covering the wagon-beds to show the stacked sacks of grain there. As soon as the villagers realized what the wagons were carrying, there was a huge cheer from the crowd.

Noticing what the guard on the leading wagon was doing, the guards on the wagons following behind started to do the same. Kivamus remembered that many of those guards were common villagers just a week ago, and their families would likely be standing within that crowd, so it was understandable that they wanted to show off the grain to reassure their families.

"We are saved!" one of the villagers cheered. "Thank the goddess!"

"Thank the new baron!" a woman shouted. "The village won't starve now!"

The cheers from the villagers continued for a while, as all the wagons exited the street and slowly began to enter the gates of the manor.

That happiness was contagious, and he could see the residents of the manor also sharing the enthusiasm of the villagers. The maids, servants and the guards standing near the gates with huge smiles on their faces were clapping and cheering as well to welcome the return of the caravan. It must have been a long time since they had seen so many sacks of grain in the manor. Lucem and Clarisa seemed to be jumping in joy nearby, while Syryne and Madam Helga half-heartedly tried to calm down the kids, with happiness easily visible on their faces.

As the wagons slowed to a stop inside the manor, their drivers slowly parked them in a column, and immediately, a flurry of activity started in the light of the burning torches nearby. The grooms unhitched the tired horses and led them towards the animal shed for feeding and watering them. The creaking

sound of maids drawing water from the well and the enthusiastic whinnies of the horses filled the air as the grooms went about their work.

Noticing that the baron was also standing amongst the onlookers, the young guard in the leading wagon jumped out of the wagon seat and gave a bow to Kivamus. The rest of the guards climbed down from the wagons as well after the long journey, and many of them stretched their hands above their heads after time spent sitting for so long. It was the first time most of them had been out of the village and they seemed quite happy to be back in the familiar surroundings of the manor.

"What's your name?" Kivamus asked the well-built guard who had bowed to him.

The guard seemed quite surprised to be addressed directly by the baron. He stood even more straight. "I'm... I'm Tesyb, milord!" he stammered. "I... The journey..."

"It's okay. Take a moment to breathe first," Kivamus said with a gentle smile. "There is no need to be nervous."

Nodding quickly, Tesyb took a few deep breaths, before he spoke again. "Thank you milord." He continued, while standing straight at attention, "I want to report that the journey went well, and we have returned with all the grain we could carry with us."

"That's indeed good news. Where are Feroy and Pydas?"

Tesyb looked towards one of the wagons at the end of the line. "They were in one of the trailing wagons, milord."

Kivamus nodded. "Okay. Bring them to me, and then you all can go to rest in the servants' hall after your meal. I've heard that Madam Nerida has prepared fresh bread and soup for you all."

"Thank you, milord! I'll bring them immediately, milord!" Tesyb replied with a big smile while still keeping a stiff posture, and jogged off towards the trailing wagons.

Kivamus smiled at the enthusiasm of the young guard. "He's the son of Pinoto, isn't he?"

Duvas replied, "He is, my Lord. He used to be a miner in the past, before we selected him as a guard."

"He is one of the two recruits who were already good in a fight, even though he needs more training to actually fight well with a sword," Hudan remarked. "The other one is that archer, Yufim, who had also gone on this trip."

"That reminds me," Kivamus said, "how is the training coming for the other recruits?"

"It will take some time until they are as good as the experienced guards," Hudan replied, "but they are still much better than they were a week ago. For the next trip to Cinran, I'll rotate the guards who'll stay here, and send those recruits who have gotten a week of training, so that I can hold back the new guards who went on the first trip to train them now." He added, "I'll still send Yufim and Tesyb with the caravan since they are nearly at the same level as trained guards already."

"That seems like a good idea," Kivamus commented. "It would be good to give some experience to every new guard."

Soon, he saw Feroy and Pydas walking towards them. While the ex-mercenary looked the same as always - if a little muddied, Pydas seemed exhausted.

Reaching there, Feroy started to speak, but the merchant interrupted him with a bow, "I apologize milord, but if it's alright with you, I'll be back tomorrow morning to talk about all the details of the journey with you. I need a drink. Or a dozen." Pydas added, "I'll leave all my wagons here for the night. Feroy can give you the general idea of everything for now," and then he looked at Kivamus' face in expectation of getting the permission.

Kivamus looked at the merchant in surprise. He was curious about the details of the trip but looking at the weary face of the merchant, he relented. "That's alright, Pydas. It's been a long journey for you, since you've been traveling for a while now, before we even met you outside the gates of Cinran. You can leave, but remember to meet with me tomorrow."

"Thank you, milord. I'll be here before eight bells in the morning." And with a grateful nod, the merchant called up his own guard, and walked away with hurried steps towards the manor gates, likely to get wasted in the village alehouse.

Kivamus gazed at the leaving merchant for a moment, then asked Feroy, "What's up with him? Was there any problem on the trip?"

Feroy gave a shrug. "Nothing to get worried about, milord. There was a wild boar attack on our camp near Helga's inn yesterday, but we came out just fine. But Pydas has been troubled since then."

Kivamus was worried to hear about the boar attack. "Is everyone okay then?"

"Sure, sure, milord. They're all just fine, other than a twisted ankle for a newbie. I've told the guards to rest now, and we'll unload the wagons tomorrow in the daylight." Feroy looked at Kivamus with a smirk. "But if it's all the same with you milord, I'd rather talk more over a mug of ale, you know?"

Kivamus gave a laugh, shaking his head. It seemed like both Feroy and the merchant really liked the taste of ale. "Come on inside, then. We'll talk more in the manor hall."

They turned back to walk, as Hudan gave a good natured slap on the back of Feroy. He asked with a laugh, "You and your drinking... That's the first thing you think of when you return?"

Feroy shrugged and gave a smirk as they walked, "What do you even mean? I couldn't drink anything at all in the past week, so I've gotta catch up, don't I?"

Hudan laughed loudly and patted Feroy's back again in reply as they reached the door of the manor hall.

Kivamus gave a laugh as well. It felt good to see the camaraderie of Hudan and Feroy. They had known each other for years while living at Helga's Inn, and seemed like long-time friends now.

Reaching inside, they settled on the armchairs near the fireplace, while Feroy requested madam Helga for a mug of ale. Taking his lead, Hudan and Gorsazo asked for a mug as well.

They waited for a few minutes while Madam Helga brought the mugs to those who had asked for it, before taking a seat nearby as well.

"Well, were you able to buy everything then?" Kivamus asked the ex-mercenary.